

Don't Look, Don't See: Time for Honest Media Reporting on Impacts of Pesticides

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The UK-based Independent online newspaper recently published an article about a potential link between air pollution from vehicles and glaucoma. It stated that according to a new study air pollution is linked to the eye condition that causes blindness.

The report explained that researchers had looked at vision tests carried out on more than 111,000 people across Britain between 2006 and 2010 and cross-referenced results against levels of [air pollution](#) in their neighbourhoods. Those living in areas with higher amounts of fine particulate matter were at least 6% more likely to have glaucoma than those in the least polluted areas.

Glaucoma affects half a million people in the UK and can cause blindness if left untreated. However, the study cited by The Independent, published in Investigative Ophthalmology & Visual Science, was unable to prove that air pollution was a trigger.

Following the article, environmentalist **Dr Rosemary Mason** put together a 20-page report on glyphosate and has sent it out to key public health officials and media outlets, including The Independent's editor. In her report, she states that the European Chemicals Agency classifies glyphosate as a substance that causes serious eye damage and is toxic to aquatic life with long lasting effects. But she claims that the media still remains silent on the matter. Even in UK towns and cities, glyphosate-based Roundup herbicide is still being sprayed on weeds and super-weeds which have become Roundup-resistant.

Mason implores The Independent and other mainstream media outlets to write with honesty about the use and harmful effects of glyphosate-based weedicides and other agrochemicals. She quotes the UN expert on Toxics, **Baskut Tuncak**, who in 2017 urged the EU to put children's health before pesticides. Children form the most vulnerable part of the population as pesticides can adversely affect their development.

Offering insight into the incidence of cataracts in England, Mason notes that annual rates of admission for cataract surgery rose 10-fold from 1968 to 2004: from 62 episodes per 100,000 population to 637. A 2016 study by the WHO also confirmed that the incidence of cataracts had greatly increased: in 'A global assessment of the burden of disease from environmental risks' it says that cataracts are the leading cause of blindness worldwide. Globally, cataracts are responsible for 51% of blindness. An estimated 20 million individuals suffer from this degenerative eye disease.

Mason discusses long waiting lists for cataracts in England. Because the NHS cannot cope with the pressure, private companies are cashing in. The growing demand for cataract

operations is forcing the NHS to send [increasing numbers of patients to be treated privately](#).

In Wales, where Mason resides, 35,000 patients are at risk of going blind from macular degeneration and glaucoma while on the NHS waiting list. All the municipal councils in Wales use glyphosate-based herbicides. Glyphosate now accounts for about [50% of all herbicide use](#) in the US. About [75% of glyphosate](#) use has occurred since 2006, with [the global glyphosate](#) market projected to reach \$11.74 billion by 2023.

Figures for the use of glyphosate in the UK show a similar trend, which Mason has documented in her many reports. And let us not forget at this point that the current Conservative government regards Brexit as an ideal opportunity to usher in crops that have been genetically engineered to withstand the application of glyphosate or similar chemicals. The agrochemicals sector stands in the wings salivating at the prospect. This has nothing to do with boosting yields or 'feeding the world' as Boris Johnson asserts (claims which [fail to stand up to scrutiny](#)) but has everything to do with facilitating industry ambitions.

Never in history has a chemical been [used](#) so pervasively. Glyphosate is in our air, water, plants, animals, grains, vegetables and meats. It's in beer and wine, children's [breakfast cereal and snack bars](#) and mother's breast milk. It's even in our vaccines.

Of course, the power of the pesticides companies has been well noted. In 2017, global agrochemical corporations were severely criticised by UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food, **Hilal Elver**. A report presented to the UN human rights council accused them of the "systematic denial of harms", "aggressive, unethical marketing tactics" and heavy lobbying of governments which has "obstructed reforms and paralysed global pesticide restrictions."

The report authored by Hilal Elver and Baskut Tuncak says pesticides have "catastrophic impacts on the environment, human health and society as a whole", including an estimated 200,000 deaths a year from acute poisoning. Its authors said:

"It is time to create a global process to transition toward safer and healthier food and agricultural production."

Hilal Elver says:

"Using more pesticides is nothing to do with getting rid of hunger. According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), we are able to feed nine billion people today. Production is definitely increasing, but the problem is poverty, inequality and distribution."

Elver said many of the pesticides are used on commodity crops, such as palm oil and soy, not the food needed by the world's hungry people:

"The corporations are not dealing with world hunger; they are dealing with more agricultural activity on large scales."

Mason notes that chronic exposure to pesticides has been linked to a range of diseases and conditions and that certain pesticides can persist in the environment for decades and pose a

threat to the entire ecological system on which food production depends. The excessive use of pesticides contaminates soil and water sources, causing loss of biodiversity and destroying the natural enemies of pests. The impact of such overuse also imposes staggering costs on national economies. Moreover, the use of neonicotinoid pesticides is particularly worrying because they are linked to a systematic collapse in the number of bees around the world. Some 71% of crop species are bee pollinated.

Mason goes on to describe the various lawsuits in the US against Bayer (which bought Monsanto) and the tactics used by Monsanto to conceal glyphosate-based Roundup's carcinogenicity, including capturing regulatory agencies, corrupting public officials, bribing scientists and engaging in scientific fraud to delay its day of reckoning.

Following the court decision to award in favour of **Dewayne Johnson**, attorney **Robert Kennedy Jr** said the following at the post-trial press conference:

“... you not only see many people injured, but you also see a subversion of democracy. You see the corruption of public officials, the capture of agencies that are supposed to protect us all from pollution. The agencies become captured by the industries they are supposed to regulate. The corruption of science, the falsification of science, and we saw all those things happen here. This is a company (Monsanto) that used all of the plays in the playbook developed over 60 years by the tobacco industry to escape the consequences of killing one of every five of its customers... Monsanto... has used those strategies...”

There is now also a good deal of scientific evidence [linking glyphosate](#) to obesity, depression, Alzheimer's, ADHD, autism, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's, kidney disease, inflammatory bowel disease and brain, breast and prostate cancer, miscarriage, birth defects and declining sperm counts. Strong science suggests glyphosate is the culprit in the exploding epidemics of celiac disease, colitis, gluten sensitivities, diabetes and non-alcoholic liver cancer which, for the first time, is attacking children as young as 10. Researchers also peg glyphosate as a potent endocrine disruptor, which interferes with sexual development in children.

The compound is also a chelator that removes important minerals from the body, including iron, magnesium, zinc, selenium and molybdenum. Roundup [disrupts the microbiome](#) destroying beneficial bacteria in the human gut and triggering brain inflammation and other ill effects.

Neurotransmitter changes in the brain have been detected due to exposure to glyphosate. This is why, according to Mason, there are so many mental health and psychiatric disorders, depression, suicides, anxiety and violence among children and adults. It is even found in popular breakfast cereals marketed for UK children.

And this says nothing about the cocktail of pesticides sprayed on crops. The Soil Association and PAN UK have indicated that exposure to mixtures of pesticides commonly found in UK food, water and soil may be harming the health of both humans and wildlife. A quarter of all food and over a third of fruit and vegetables consumed in the UK contain pesticide cocktails, with some items containing traces of up to 14 different pesticides.

The UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Environment has identified the rights

threatened by environmental harm, including the rights to life, health, food and water and has mapped obligations to protect against such harm from private actors. In effect, where pesticides are concerned, the public are being denied the right to a healthy environment.

But it's not just the powerful pesticides lobby that is to blame here. Rosemary Mason says the British public (and indeed people across the world) have a right to information. However, she concludes that the public have been denied this because mainstream media outlets have on the whole for too long opted to remain silent on the pesticides issue.

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This article touches on just a few of the points in Rosemary Mason's report. Readers can access the full text of ['Glyphosatecauses serious eye damage' on the academia.edu site.](#)

Colin Todhunter is a frequent contributor to *Global Research* and *Asia-Pacific Research*.

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